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# PSYCHOCULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN'S LEARNING IN JAPAN

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Merry I. White

January 6, 1986

# Psychocultural Environments for Children's Learning in Japan

## Overview: Parents and Schooling

Japanese parents have long been deeply involved in their children's education. When compulsory attendance and government-sponsored schools were instituted in 1872, approximately 40% of the boys and 10% of the girls of school age had already had some formal schooling and could read. (Dore, 1965; Nishi, 1982). The fact that a large majority of these children were educated at their families' expense demonstrates that education, especially for boys, was a significant parental priority. In addition to providing for educational expenses, families sometimes taught their children at home, or arranged for tutors to teach them. This was especially common for daughters of samurai and wealthier merchant families (Dore, 1965).

However, the current intense emphasis on academic achievement common among middle-class families is a relatively recent phenomenon. Embree, in 1939, recorded that at that time, very few children continued beyond elementary school, and most parents expected adolescents to cease schooling in order to contribute

to the family economy. Edward Norbeck, in his 1974 restudy of a Japanese fishing community which he had originally studied in 1950 (Norbeck, 1978) speculates that the strong emphasis on educational achievement emerged in this community during the 1950s. In the period between 1950 and 1974, the kyoiku mama syndrome (education-obsessed mother) emerged among some families, and a new intensity was apparent in the mother-child relationship. The reduction in family size and lightening of domestic responsibilities were said to contribute to to women's increased concern with their children's achievement (Bingham, 1979; Norbeck, 1978). Mothers' self-identities became increasingly focussed on fostering educational success in their children (Norbeck, 1978).

In contemporary Japan, a family's status striving is likely to be focused upon urging the child onward and upward through the educational system (DeVos, 1979). This is serious business, as a boy's ability to secure a prestigious, well-paid job, or a girl's ability to make a good marriage are believed to be directly related to their success in entrance examinations. Beginning with preschools, each school in a given area is informally ranked according to its ability to send its graduates to elite schools at the next level (Vogel, 1979). Access to the next level

is usually determined by examination, and the examinations which determine high school and university entrance are the most competitive. The pressure to achieve percolates upward to cause yearly inflation in the minimum scores necessary to enter elite universities, and percolates downward to create an emphasis on preparation for school which begins during the pre-school years.

The immense amount of assistance required to ensure a child's success in the educational system is provided by the mother. Efforts to ensure the child's academic success may resemble an inter-family competition in which each mother-child team is in competition with others (Vogel, 1979). Suzanne Vogel's (1978) description of urban middle-class women's "professional career" of housevife and mother observes:

"To understand the educational ardor of a Japanese middle-class mother, it is necessary to realize that her lifetime personal success is at stake. Nurturance is her job, her children are her primary product, and her children's academic success is the major criterion of her success in this middle class, upwardly mobile society. A mother whose child wears the uniform of one of the prestigious high schools is proud and secure in her respected status. Other mothers will come to her and ask for advice about study methods. A mother whose

child has not succeeded at school is ashamed, and if he has done very badly, disgraced." (p.27)

Interest in and concern for children's learning begins during the preschool years. Mothers informally teach their children many games and activities which encourage concentration and develop experience with educational materials such as writing and counting games, draving, origami, and listening to story books (Lebra, 1976; S. Vogel, 1978; E. Vogel, 1963). Most of this training occurs in the context of enjoyable cooperative activities (Sakamoto, 1975; Vogel, 1963). Parents purchase numerous supplementary educational mateials for their preschool children, such as toys, games, workbooks, and children's magazines. Parents buy an average of two or three books each month for their preschool children, and the most popular children's monthly activity magazine for preschoolers (of which there are 40 on the market) sells over a million copies a year (Sakamoto, 1975). The hours spent together in this manner set the stage for the mother's later assistance with school work.

The effectiveness of this informal home assistance in teaching early reading, and the gradual historical increment in reading levels at elementary school entrance can be seen in the results of nationvide studies conducted in 1953 and 1967 (Sakamoto, 1975). In

1953, six-year-old children in the first month of elementary school read on the average 26.2 of the 48 basic hiragana letters of the phonetic alphabet. In 1967, a survey of five-year-old children who were to enter elementary school in five months showed that the average had risen to 36.8 letters. Currently, it is rare for urban children not to be able to read all of the 48 basic letters and to write many of them as well (Nagano, 1981).

In addition to reading and other academically oriented activities, mothers also emphasize interpersonal skills which facilitate their children's transition to early learning situations. All reports which describe Japanese mothers' expectations for their children's behavior note the importance attached to the maintenance of interpersonal harmony, and avoidance of disagreements and displays of aggressive behavior, especially with non-family members (Conroy et al, 1980; Lanham, 1956, 1966; Norbeck and Norbeck, 1956; E. Vogel, 1963). Hess and his Japanese colleagues (1980) compared the ages at which Japanese and American mothers expected mastery of various types of behaviors. Japanese mothers emphasized earlier mastery of skills which demonstrated self-control, compliance with adult authority, and social courtesy, while American mothers emphasized individual action and choice-making, ,

standing up for one's rights, and other forms of self assertion.

Japanese preschool children are almost always closely supervised while playing with neighbor children, and disagreements are swiftly defused by adults who rarely take sides, but admonish both not to quarrel (Lebra, 1976; Norbeck and Norbeck, 1956). Older children are usually instructed to yield to younger ones without serious regard for the "justice" of either child's claim against the other (Lebra, 1976; E. Vogel, 1963). The ability to place the maintenance of interpersonal harmony over a particular instance of individual rights is termed "losing to win," (Benedict, 1946) and is considered an important ability necessary for mature social interaction.

Most Japanese children attend some type of preschool - either nursery school (yochien) or day care (hoikuen). Statistics (Monbusho, 1979) show that 65% of five-year-olds, 50% of four-year-olds, and 7.5% of three-year-olds are enrolled in nursery school. It may be estimated that an additional half of each of these percentages is enrolled in day care, which brings the percentage of enrollment in either nursery school or day care is 63.8% for three, four, and five-year-olds averaged together.

The typical curriculum of pre-schools is non-academic, and basically play-oriented (Nagano, 1981). Less than 20% of nursery schools provide explicit instruction in reading hiragana letters, for example, (Sakamoto, 1975). Bingham (1979) notes that day care teachers are not overly solicitous, and try to encourage children to take care of their own needs whenever possible. Children voluntarily comply with teachers' requests, and defiance and insubordination are rare (Carmichael and Carmichael, 1972; Lanham, 1966). Children typically engage enthusiastically and responsibly in self-directed activity, exhibiting long periods of concentration and soliciting and requiring little teacher attention. Incidents of interpersonal aggression are rarely countered by aggressive retaliation (Carmichael and Carmichael, 1972; Lanham, 1966). Catherine Lewis (1983) notes the teacher's management of the classroom to avoid both over-direction and inattention, and to engage children in appropriate behavior.

Maternal involvement becomes much more extensive and serious once the child enters elementary school. In addition to formal involvement in frequent ceremonies and school events, monthly PTA meetings, and parent visitation days, the mother spends considerable time each day helping the child with schoolwork. During

elementary school, she monitors assignments, checks homework problems, answers questions, and ensures that the child is prepared for the next day. As the child becomes more self-reliant and schoolwork more difficult, mothers still provide substantial assistance, by quizzing before tests, assisting with a review schedule, and even sharpening pencils. Sometimes mothers assist their children so actively in the construction of elaborate craft and homework projects that women joke that the school teacher is really grading the neighborhood mothers by proxy.

Mothers are also in charge of planning the next step of the child's education, and spend substantial time and energy investigating various schools and preparatory classes, and collecting information to facilitate the child's transition to the next level of schooling. If the family is not affluent enought to afford supplementary lessons or private tutors, the mother considers it her responsibility to take a part time job to pay for the child's lessons.

The most important type of assistance a mother renders, however, is encouragement and moral support. Her attempts to create an environment conducive to study include rearranging her housework schedule so that she is free to sit with the children as they study, answering questions, preparing snacks, and

staying up to keep them company while they study late into the night. It is the mother's responsibility to see that her children put in the necessary amount of study, and she must do this in a low-key, non-authoritarian manner so that they work willingly and seriously at the task. To do so, a mother stimulates her children's motivation to succeed by demonstrating how important the examinations are to her, emphasizing their importance to the children's future life success, and increasing their uneasiness about the difficulty of the examinations. (Vogel, 1963).

In contrast to Western theories of achievement, which emphasize individual effort and ability, Japanese consider academic achievement to be an outgrowth of an interdependent network of cooperative effort and planning (Glazer, 1976). Kiefer (1970) notes that in Japan, responsibility for success in examinations has shifted from the school setting to the family, where parents have more direct control over their children's preparation and level of effort. Although pressure to study is exerted by the family, because the examination threat is represented as an external force, it functions to increase the solidarity of the family and the mother-child relationship. The best way for the child to cope with the anxiety created by the examinations is to solicit and maintain the support of more powerful

figures, particularly the mother and teacher. Mothers realize that a substantial amount of their ability to influence their children's behavior comes from their ability to function as a bulwark against examination anxiety.

Although mothers openly sympathize with their children's lack of free time and the necessity of long hours of study, examinations are treated as an unfortunate but inescapable aspect of the outside world. Because effort is considered more important than ability in determining academic performance (Vogel, 1979), nothing but hard work will ensure children's success. Throughout this process, the mother remains an ally and supporter of her children's difficult struggle. (E. Vogel, 1963; S. Vogel, 1978). Overt rebellion against the demands of school assignments and test preparation is relatively rare, and most children identify closely with their parents' aspirations for and efforts to ensure their academic success.

In cases where the mother and child do not share an emotionally close and mutually cooperative relationship, interpersonal difficulties frequently become focussed on study and school achievement (Vogel, 1963). Refusal to do homework or to attend school are common ways in which children demonstrate their anger

at their parents. (Fukazava, 1982). Insensitive pressure to excel and expectations in excess of a child's abilities may cause insecurity and even delinquency, and are also cited in cases of parent abuse (Fukazava, 1982; Vogel, 1962). Although examination-related suicides produce good copy for the newspapers, such cases are actually rare and have declined over the last twenty years. While suicide rates are higher among young adults than other age groups, Japanese suicide rates have exhibited this relative pattern since 1882, when academic and occupational selection pressures were considerably less intense (DeVos, 1979). At the present time, suicide among Japanese youth is less frequent than it is among their European counterparts. (Vogel, 1979).

This paper will describe in greater depth the psychological and cultural environments in which Japanese children learn, most particularly that of the family. I will attempt to describe the cultural conceptions of parenting and learning which underlie the achievements of children in schools, and will outline some possible directions in which change may take the family and child.

## The Traditional Japanese Family

Views of the traditional Japanese family in the social science literature have tended to emphasize what is characterized as "the Confucian model". This model stresses vertical relationships within the family, that is, relationships between members of different relative statuses. The most significant relationship in this context is that between parent and child, though elder brother - younger brother, husband - wife, lord - minister and friend - friend are also, in practise, relationships guided by the moral positioning of Confucian ethics.

The ethic which deeply tinges the relationship of parent and child in the Confucian model is that of filiality. The traditional Chinese conception of filiality, as embodied in the "Five Relationships" stressed the obligations due from the junior to senior in status. There were several mitigating emphases which altered the nature of filiality in Japan from its original Chinese character. First, while the junior member of a dyad was unfailingly to perform his or her duties to the senior, the senior also had well-defined obligations toward the junior -- particularly those of nurturance or "sponsorship". Second, while Japanese society was in pre-modern times a stringently class-bound society with little mobility or few options

for an individual to change his or her status, the verticality of the social structure was complemented and "buffered" by an emphasis also on "horizontal" supportive peer relationships and by the communal nature of life.

A traditional Japanese family participated deeply in its community at the same time as it focussed on the perpetuation of its own line through the generations. Agrarian villages were internally interdependent, and cooperative sharing of labor and mechanical devices was encouraged especially where irrigation demanded more communal efforts. Inappropriate or "selfish" behavior by individuals or families was a community concern, and in extreme cases, a person or family could be ostracised by the village.

Family prosperity meant family continuity, and the obligation to pass the household on intact and if possible improved to future generations was the chief responsibility of the incumbent household head. Strict primogeniture and blood lines were less important than management skills in choosing an heir to continue the household, and if an eldest son should be a ne'er-do-well, he might be avoided in favor of a younger, or even in favor of an adopted, son, brought into the family in adulthood to marry a daughter and take his wife's family name.

To generalize about child-rearing practises in the traditional family is difficult, for there perhaps was more diversity in pre-modern times than exists today. Rural-urban differences, differences in economic conditions, variation by occupation or trade, as well as regional differences contributed to the wide range of ideas and practises surrounding child development in pre-modern Japan. For example, while in some areas infants were carried by mothers on their backs, in others infants were swaddled and left in baskets apart from the mother as she worked. (Hara, 1974).

Especially in agricultural families, the child was seen as needing to develop adult skills quickly and this was done by imitation and by the gradual incorporation of the child into the family work team, as his skills improved. School was not seen as a place where occupational skills were developed, and while important to the development of the child's "virtue". School was somewhat residual, yielding often to the needs of the farm, especially at planting and harvesting times.

Among wealthier urban or aristocratic families, "childhood" as a separate stage in life was more prolonged, with more attention given to formal schooling as well as to lessons in swordsmanship, arts and other refinements. The future responsibilities of the child

as a member of the family and its trade or rank or as a future member of another family were impressed on him or her at an early age, and social skills were more highly stressed than were manual ones, though at all levels, thrift and respect for nature were inculcated.

Girls were trained on a different path from that of boys. Girls and boys played together until about the age of 6, when they were separated. This separation took place more often in the upper classes but in all families, girls were separately trained in household skills and where possible in literacy and arts too. They were repeatedly taught that they would be leaving their natal family for their husgband's household and must not disgrace their family in their new life. Sons knew that their life chances depended on birth order (for the most part) and if the eldest, a boy knew he might inherit the family property and ultimately would be responsible for his younger brothers' futures as well. Younger sons either left to seek employment in the cities, through kinship ties (Vogel, in Dore, 1976) or might be set up in a branch house (bunke) related to the main house (honke) through a series of ties of obligation and responsibility. In any case, the family property was as far as possible kept intact and since land was scarce, the average farm in 18-- was only -- hectares; there was not a lot to divide.

The Urban Middle Class Family

Studies of the contemporary Japanese family stress the three following "concomitants of modernization":

1.) the isolation of the nuclear family and loss of kinship support systems

2.) the separation of male and female spheres of work and influence

3.) the intensity of focus on children in the family

The first observation (influenced by Wirth, Goode and other modernization theorists) is tied to Western views of the effects of urbanization and industrialization on the family. The common view is that with migration to cities, and employment in workplaces outside the home, family life suffered isolation and anomie. While sons, especially younger sons, did leave for the city, did marry there and set up neolocal nuclear households. The Japanese did not suffer the worst of the ills of modernization. For example, later in the family life cycle, they might take in aged parents or a younger sibling or cousin as they too looked for work in the cities. Further, the urban family was not isolated from the security and

support provided by the extended family in the countryside. It is true that because the male worked outside the home, usually at a factory, the woman became the household manager and the home and her children's daily lives became her sphere of work and influence while her husband's role at home diminished. And, as a result, especially as household tasks became lighter due to the introduction of modern time-saving appliances and due to the smaller size and more efficient construction of apartments and urban houses, mothers' attention became focussed on their children.

It is clear that a view of the modern Japanese family leads us to see that there are non-Western ways of being "modern", even given the same kinds of industrial development, the same demands of urban life as exist in the contemporary West. The differences in experiences of childhood in Japan and the West are perhaps explained by the differences in modern family life as well as in the persisting cultural traditions of child-rearing.

The contemporary Japanese family does in fact exhibit the three characteristics noted at the beginning of this section but a little more detail will highlight the distinctly Japanese form they exhibit. First, the nuclear family, compared to previous generations, often

does live separate from other kin, with the exception of eldest sons and their families, who tend to stay in or near the parental household, even where inheritance of a family occupation is not a factor. However, those families which are geographically separate from kin are rarely as out of touch as their Western counterparts who may see kin once or twice a year if at all. Studies have shown that women in particular are in very close contact with their mothers. As researchers have observed (Imamura, 1985), women stay in close touch by telephone, if distance prevents visits. Kin also provide support in times of crisis or need, and the use of extended family as "Japan's welfare system" still prevails. Old people, for example, are more likely to reside with family members than to live alone or in nursing homes.

Second, the separation of male and female spheres of work and influence has long been noted in the Japanese family (S. Vogel, 1978; Lebra, 1984; Pharr, 1977). As noted above, with industrialization, women were isolated from income-producing labor outside the home. While the restrictions (cultural as well as structural) on women working outside the home prevented the majority of housewives from contributing to the family's cash income, they were seen as providing the equally important supportive and restorative environment

for their husbands and, even more important, were given "social credit" for raising healthy and successful children. (Suzanne Vogel, 1978)

The fact that the Japanese family is seen as a locus for child-rearing, rather than as a locus for the self-fulfillment of adults, is a significant fact in the comparison of Japanese and Western households and their psychocultural environments. While some younger women chafe at the expectation that they will quit work upon marriage or at the birth of their first child, many feel well-rewarded in the social and emotional support mothering receives. The separation of spheres does not produce as strong an effect of devaluation of women's roles as observed in the West: women rarely say "I'm <u>just</u> a housewife."

Finally, the intensity of focus on children, not just exhibited in the relationship of mother and child, but culturally supported and nationally reinforced, is not seen in every industrialized nation. All advanced nations do, of course, institutionalize a priority on children's education by supporting public, universal schooling and by passing legislation to protect children. In fact, an indicator of development is this attention to "other people's children" on a national policy level (LeVine and White, 1986). But within the spectrum of attention to children in

industrialized societies, Japan represents an extreme case, both on the national and on the familial levels.

It is important to note that Japanese policymakers and educators see the family as the most critical environment for children's development. Families are seen to provide the basic support and socialization needed for the schools to do their job. Moreover, when something goes wrong, as in the pathological situations where children develop school-phobia or suffer from bullying at school -- or where a child's grades have fallen -- teachers, counsellors and parents themselves blame the home and mother first (Margaret Lock, 1985). It should be said, however, that while the current media and expert response to the crisis of bullying (ijime) in the schools focusses on insufficiencies in the home, other commentators, generally those whose perspective is framed by opposition to majority thinking, such as the Japan Teachers' Union, say that it is the educational system which is at fault.

For our purposes here it is sufficient however to note the attention given to the family as the most crucial environment for the child, and to note the mother's acceptance of, or complicity in, the reinforcement of her role as the key provider to the child. The intensity of her attention has been seen as contributing to the pathologies noted in the schools

but it is also seen as the first line of remediation of those problems.

The Relationship of Mother and Child

Since the 1950s much data has been collected on the relationship of mother and infant in the Japanese household, initiated by collaborative studies between American and Japanese researchers. (Caudill, Lanham, Sikkema, Hess and Azuma, et al ) While some change has been noted in replications of earlier research, especially by Caudill, the findings overall indicate that Japanese mothers spend more time in the presence of their babies, keep them physically closer, but vocalise to them less, than do American mothers.

The beginning of the mother's close relationship with her child is during pregnancy, when the mother is already seen to be responsible for the child's future health and intelligence. The pregnant women is surrounded with advice, lore and admonitions seen as essential to the well-being of her future child. She is told to stay at home as much as possible, to bind her belly with tight sashes, to eat no eggplant (and other tabooed items), to read only uplifting, positive books, and always to wear warm socks.

Taikyo, or "education in the womb" is a concept of long tradition in Japan, and implies cognitive, moral and general developmental interventions before birth. The mother's womb is thought to be an ideal environment, properly maintained, for the child, and leaving it is seen to be traumatic for the infant. Thus the popularity in Japan several years ago of a recording of "the sounds of the womb", which, it was thought, would benefit every Japanese newborn as he adjusted to the world outside the womb.

Early Mothering

Once the baby is born, and the "sounds of the womb" only a faint echo, the mother's tasks begin in earnest. As I said, the mother derives her social value from mothering and the society contributes its support and cultural programming toward this end. There are several ways in which cultural conceptions of childhood contribute to the mother's importance and to her task.

First, the baby is seen to be born with no particular abilities or disabilities and the efforts of taikyo are seen at best to contribute to the creation of this blank slate, this tabula rasa. The practises are mostly designed to prevent harm from distorting the

child's potential, rather than to enrich or lend advantage to the child. The mother's role in providing an appropriate environment and stimuli is crucial: she must provide all that is needed to establish the child in society -- up to and throughout schooling.

What sort of environment does the mother provide? The first and most important element in this world she creates is herself, and her constant availability. Japanese mothers are with their babies constantly, and are physically close to them much more than are American mothers. The mother bathes with her child, and holds him or carries him next to her constantly. The mother sleeps beside her infant, either lying next to the child's futon or placing the baby on her own. This facilitates nursing and mothers also explain the convenience by saying they can prevent the baby from disturbing other members of the household. Sleeping near others is traditional practise in Japan, and even in houses with sufficient rooms that each child might have his or her own, children sleep together or with adults. When I helped a Japanese researcher to find housing for his family who were soon to arrive in Boston, we visited several apartments. As they had a new baby, I suggested that a second bedroom in one would be perfect as his room. The father was surprised and confused and made me repeat this unlikely

suggestion, to which he finally replied, " The baby sleeps with us, of course: he'd be lonely without us -- that room would be my study."

An interesting Japanese concept, which has been given an "English" name, is "skinship", which means the closeness one experiences by touching, preferably skin to skin. The mother's relationship with her baby typifies this closeness. Babies are not left in cribs or playpens and are always taken with the mother rather than left with babysitters or kin when she does errands or goes visiting. While in the past older siblings might care for younger ones, these children are now too busy with studies, or are not seen as appropriate as caretakers by the mother. Japanese babies are not put in carriages or strollers, but are carried strapped on the mother's back. Fathers, even on family excursions, are rarely seen with babies on their backs, which might indicate that he had taken on a maternal role, but he may take a turn and, somewhat awkwardly, carry an infant in his arms, if the mother must tend to an older child, or carry purchases.

While American mothers busily go in and out of a baby's room, engaged in cleaning, neatening, fixing or perhaps in tasks unrelated to the child, a Japanese mother will sit quietly by the side of the baby, or even

lie down beside the napping baby. The American mother might rub the baby's back until he falls asleep, or sing to him, but will stop when he falls asleep, whereas a Japanese mother will continue topat the baby, rock him, or carry him long after he has fallen asleep. One might say that the American sees her role as a set of tasks, such as "getting the baby to sleep", and the Japanese sees her role as "being with the baby" -- one might even say, "merging with the baby". Sitting by the baby's futon after he falls asleep is thus not "vasted" or unnecessary time, but is part of her investment in the relationship. There is nothing more worthwhile to do, in any case, from her perspective.

The closeness, physical and psychological, of the relationship with a child is the measure of the success of mothering. Such close physical proximity gives the mother a chance to develop an intuitive understanding of her child's character and behavior, and to be always at hand to teach and shape him. One of my undergraduates, who has a Japanese mother, vrote a paper describing his relationship with her. His epigraph for this paper vas a poem he wrote:

I am
like the clay
always being molded
into different shapes
by two firm hands

The mother devotes herself to developing an intuitive understanding of the wishes and desires of her child. She understands his feelings and needs and fulfills them without expecting the child to first verbalize his desires. She responds to his unexpressed signals and encourages him to read her cues as well, thus creating an atmosphere of mutual sensitivity to mood and subtle body language. The child is constantly taught to avoid situations in which he causes trouble or discomfort for others (meiwaku o kakeru). This encourages the child to reflect on the consequences of his actions as well as to expect from others the same kind of consideration. The result of this training is the development of a sensitivity and inclination to respond to the subtle mood states of others.

Using her relationship with the child as a model, the mother trains the child in the ways of interpersonal relationships, but with the difference that in this one, behavior is permitted which would not be in

others. Developing dependency needs in the child, the ability to reciprocate those needs, and an ability to read subtle emotional cues to others' moods is her important task.

In the teaching process, the mother attempts at all times to avoid open confrontation with the child. By constantly repeating her requests with enthusiasm and support for the child's successes, she encourages the child a step at a time down the path towards her goals for him. The expression, "Haeba tate tateba ayumi no oyagokoro" (If he crawls, encourage him to stand; if he stands, have him walk -- such is the parent's way") indicates the step by step goal setting of the mother. If the child rebels, she moves to protect the relationship with him, rather than forcing the issue at the expense of alienating the child. In this way she trains him both to the style of interpersonal behavior valued by her and by society at large, but also to the daily tasks which he needs to accomplish to become responsible for himself, such as brushing his teeth or dressing himself. The child is not confronted with inflexible demands, but with constant suggestion and encouragement and an unworried expectation that he will eventually conform.

The Home Curriculum

In order that their children receive the grounding for a successful school career, most mothers train the child in school-related studies during the pre-school years. The gradual shift in emphasis from the mother's role in encouraging "good breeding" (shitsuke) to an emphasis on home training in preparation for school (yoji kyoiku) occurs around the age of three. As noted in the Overview to this paper, most mothers in urban areas teach their pre-school children to read and write the phonetic alphabet, and most children can count to one hundred, and work simple computational problems involving amounts under ten before they reach first grade. They can also sing or recite several songs and poems. Most pre-schools do not teach these abilities systematically, and it is largely due to the efforts of the mother than the children develop these abilities before they enter first grade.

Japanese mothers take the education of pre-schoolers at home very seriously indeed, and have a curriculum for them which is consciously and sensitively managed. Most of these activities are informal. Mothers spend many hours in cooperative games and pursuits with their children, such as draving, reading storybooks, and playing writing and counting games. As

noted earlier, there are many publications to help parents teach their children. Even at the playground, where an American mother usually spends her time monitoring the safety of her child's play, the Japanese mother uses opportunities to teach: "How many stones does Taroo have? Let's take one away..." The Japanese mother's didactic interventions are for the most part activities in which she engages with the child, while American mothers may invest in games and toys advertised as providing the child with "hours of happy and educational independent activity".

Besides increasing a child's store of information and cognitive skills, the mother tries to train the child to concentrate. The importance of single-minded effort, of intense dedication, of 100%-ness, is imparted to the child. The mother keeps the child on one activity at a time, and other things are secondary. While some teenagers are called "nagarazoku" or members of the "tribe of 'whilers'", doing something while doing something else, mothers try to discourage this and feel that even when they are watching TV, they should do that and nothing else.

The Motivating Bond

We see this intensive learning at an early age as the conscious strategy on the part of the mother to improve her child's chances in the later competitive examinations, but the basis of her energetic efforts is not necessarily this drive for advantage: rather, it is her desire to engage actively with her child, and the cognitive content of that activity is simply the currently popular vehicle for that engagement. Of course, she realizes that it might serve him well, but she also feels wholehearted pleasure in the interactions through which the advantage is being developed.

As we have noted, the psychodynamics by which the mother carries out her awesome responsibilities hinge upon the development of an emotional closeness between the mother and child. In this bond, the child needs the mother as the object of amaeru, the seeking for indulgence, which she has encouraged. (Taniuchi, 1983; Kumagai 1982; Doi; 1976). In addition, the mother has trained the child to be sensitive to others. By gauging her demands for more mature behavior on the child's part to the ability of the child to fulfill them, and by showing that she is hurt, and threatening physical distance from her when the child refuses to fulfill the demands, the mother is gradually able to shape the child's behavior in the direction of greater maturity--which does not, as in the West, imply independence. If

the child flatly refuses to go along with the mother's suggestions, she typically backs down, and while displaying her hurt, reaffirms the emotional bond with the child.

The Japanese mother will continue to look for the opportune time to reassert her desires, and is confident that through her understanding of the child's inner self, she will triumph in the end. Although this description of the mother's manipulation of the psychodynamics of this relationship makes her sound extremely Machiavellian, the majority of mothers are not overtly conscious of their psychological methods per se, and do not feel in any case that there is anything underhanded aboutthem. On the contrary, they feel that this method is the most natural and supportive of the child. Moreover, what we might call "manipulation" is seen as completely appropriate management of the child, who is not seen as an independent unit, in any case. What the mother is "managing" is a relationship, not a person. Outside observers also feel that the long-range perspective and the patient, child-focussed socialization methods are probably less "damaging" or manipulative than the techniques used in other cultures, including our own.

It is also important to note that the mother gains more than the child's success in the outside world

through her sensitive understanding and "manipulation" of the child. As above, she is developing a relationship which will last over a lifetime with the child, and her long term perspective on her mothering involves the present and future mutuality to be gained through a good relationship. By providing the understanding nurturance, and anticipatory sensitivity to the child's needs, she is engaging in a relationship satisfying to her now and in the future.

As noted above, the idea of what it means to be a good mother differs greatly from culture to culture, and we might see a relationship between the task-focussed concept of mothering in America and the evolution of the caricature of the "supermom": a woman who can list a positively inhuman number of successfully completed tasks of mothering and housework at the end of the day -- and still appear at the door, fresh and appealing, with his favorite drink prepared, when her husband returns home. The Japanese mother might not have accomplished so many discrete tasks, would not see them as "notches on her belt", and certainly would not see her role as temptress and lover as well, but she would have accomplished a wealth of nurturant attention to her child, and that, plus a cooked meal and hot bath for her late-arrived husband, would suffice unto the day.

American observers of Japanese mothers might accuse them of over-indulgence, of over-investment, in their children. What we call "mom-ism" however, has a different cast to it, and even a caricature of a Japanese mother doesn't approach Mrs. Portnoy. We see the over-invested mother as tying her children to her apronstrings, nagging and beleaguering them, controlling them through guilt and other negative manipulations. We see her as empty without her children, essentially confused about herself and her relationships with other adults.

Except for pathological cases, Japanese mothers do not confuse themselves with their children, and what we see as "merging" is a socially valued form of empathy and nurturance. There are, of course, complaints in Japan, especially among educators and media columnists, against the extremes of bad mothering. These extremes are represented on the one hand by the "over-protected" child who can do nothing for himself, and on the other by the "latchkey child" who wears his housekey around his neck and comes home to an empty kitchen. There seems to be a campaign against both: the mother who overprotects is seen to be "selfish", in a particularly Japanese meaning for the word. Her selfishness is not individualistic, but is rather the selfishness of the she-wolf who protects her nest and is unconcerned with

the society beyond. She cares only for the welfare of her own child, and the environment of her own home.

The mother of a latchkey child is the focus of even more attention, for she is to Japanese eyes non-nurturant. I was a participant on a panel in Tokyo concerned with the lives of working mothers, and at an afternoon session, a television news team took notes and filmed our discussion. I watched the news broadcast later that evening and found to my horror that my remarks had been significantly altered. To suit the expectations of the audience, the observation I made concerning Japanese attitudes toward working mothers was changed to a statement to the effect that children of mothers who are not at home when they return from school will suffer in various ways. This was accompanied by a cartoon. The first frame showed an empty kitchen, with a child sitting at the table, the clock indicating 4:00 p.m. Tears were running down his cheeks and he held in his hand a school report card with "failure" written on it. The next frame showed a kitchen with a happy child sitting at the table, a snack in front of him, showing a successful report card to his apron-bedecked, attentive mother. The reporters had created a predictable message, knowing that the audience would immediately respond to this, and ignored the questions of relativity and indigenous meaning which I had raised.

Will Mothering Change?

Catherine Colman, an American family therapist practising in Kyoto, has noted some changes among mothers, particularly among the women who live in large apartment complexes and who are isolated for much of the day. Alloving for the fact that her clients' stories represent pathologies and not normal behavior and responses, she still vonders if there might not be a crisis coming for Japanese vomen. Given that all but a very small percentage marry and have children, and that most are not engaged in any continuous or significant activity outside the home, she asks if the intensification of isolation will produce even more dedicated mothers, mothers who will then experience vhat Western mothers knov as the "empty nest syndrome"? Also she asks if the young vomen who are today considering careers instead of "before-marriage-jobs" turn their backs on nurturance, which has been so highly valued in Japanese society and in the family? Colman, like many of us, vould like to assume that Japanese society and vomen's roles can continue to change without denying such basic cultural values. Further, she expects that mothers will continue for some time to choose a demanding and satisfying role as mother.

As William Caudill said, an American mother sees her newborn baby as a dependent being who must be trained to be independent, while a Japanese mother sees her baby as having separated from her, having become independent, and in need of learning how to depend upon her again. This basic difference in perspective accounts for much of the difference in child-rearing practises between Japan and the United States, and for the great differences between the definitions of women's value and roles. A child who is independent, who can make his own breakfast and choose his own clothes in the morning, does not provide his mother with much to do, with many opportunities to engage with him. As earlier noted, we might call American middle-class mothering "task-oriented" while Japanese mothering is "relationship-oriented"; such a distinction holds true as well for other forms of work and profession in both societies.

Relationships in Japan are the ends and means of most of a person's life. Ralf Dahrendorf, in his book Life Chances, makes a distinction such as we have made between cultures in terms of what each provides the individual as a source of value and definition. He says that there are two basic kinds of orientation: one focussed on "options" and one on "ligatures". An "option-oriented" society is one where good things come

from choosing them; where the individual has options and where society supports his or her right to continue to choose and to build a life around such choices. A "ligature"-based society is one where a good life comes from relationships, and where those relationships determine the individual's life chances. Options in the latter society are not seen as positive, but may instead provide confusion and insecurity. America may be the ultimate "option" society, valuing "keeping one's options open" sometimes over commitment to any one option, and Japan (with much of the rest of the non-Western world) may be characterized as a "ligature-based" society. American work and play focus on individual effort, individually measured successes, and individual failure, while Japanese work and play focus on the group. In fact, work, or effort of any kind, does not reflect on the individual in Japan, nor are abilities seen as portable accessories a person can carry from job to job. American ideology stresses individualistically determined lives and qualities and Japanese social and cultural norms (not quite ideology) stress linkages and the constant, face-to-face reinforcement of group bonds.

With this thumb-nail distinction in hand, then, we can interpret the differences in mothering in Japan and the United States. For the American mother, it is the

development of her child as a separate, individuated person, prepared to discern and select among options, as well as to maintain the value placed on the "freedom of choice" which is the goal of child-rearing -- at least on one level. For the Japanese mother, it is the cementing of bonds, the merging with the child which allows her to raise a child prepared for other interpersonal linkages in life, the relationships which are as much an end as a means in the good life. Besides the welfare of her child, the American mother must also constantly protect her own independence, her own freedom to choose, and thus builds independence in her child to protect herself as well. The Japanese mother needs the validating ligatures herself, and thus, to protect her own identity, is reinforcing a dependent relationship with her child. This acts not only as a model for other relationships which he will develop but as the stuff of life itself for both of them.

Besides the cognitive development of her child, the mother also attends to his social and psychological development. Cooperation, mutuality and sensitivity to others rank high on the list of desired social characteristics of children but some of these cannot explicitly be taught in the intensity of the mother-child relationship as it exists in modern urban

Japan. While extended families, or nuclear families with large numbers of children, traditionally provided a natural arena for learning to cooperate and share, children today have little opportunity to interact in this way within the family. The average number of children in a Japanese family is just under two, and the omnipresence and attentiveness of the mother prevents even a pair of siblings from learning valued social skills unattended. Mothers tend to intervene and orchestrate relationships between children, and at the playground or other public place feel hesitant about their child's interactions with non-kin, since bad behavior will reflect on her, and she cannot admonish or reprimand a child not her own. Cooperation such as used to be taught in the family is now taught later, in the school.

Learning The Way

Besides cooperation, what social and psychological attributes and skills does the mother encourage? The good child is clearly one who participates eagerly in the adult's goals, and who has taken them on as his/her own. This eagerness is at least as important as the participation and its product. The way in which a child does something is often seen as the measure of

the child's character, more than the outcome of an activity, by which American children tend to be judged.

One's attitude is an important part of one's performance. The task is made up of appropriate attitude, energy, patience, and attention to detail. Traditional apprenticeships and the learning of certain traditional activities and crafts reflect this interest in process over product: if you learn how to do something, carefully and with attention to every step along the way, the finished product will naturally be a good one. As in the popular book, Zen and the Art of Archery, all skill and art are in the preparation for loosing the arrow: if each step has been done well, the archer needn't think about whether the arrow will fly true or not. In the tea ceremony, in traditional paper folding, in gardening and in the construction of automobiles, understanding "the way" is more significant than visualising the end in creating a "perfect" product. It may even be said that the moral force of method is greater than the competitive focus on quantifiable productivity. Thus, even small children are taught that you fold the paper "exactly so", you cut precisely along the line, you place your shoes parallel and in just the right spot in the hall.

An interesting comparison might be made here between what we see as "perfectionism" and what the

Japanese see as satisfying completion of related detailed tasks. When a child learns a task in Japan, he is taught in in tiny steps, each one seen as very important, and what is more significant, within his capabilities. The mastery of one of these small steps is applauded and the child sees it as in itself a moment of accomplishment. Michael Kirst notes that "Japanese children are taught that each repetition of a process always contains something new. They learn to discriminate tiny variations in routines as they are repeated." He goes on to draw the implication that this process "probably helps the Japanese perfect and improve new technology that other countries develop" (Kirst, 1981), but his observation of the learning process is I feel more aptly indicative of a significant difference in child rearing and learning than it is of technological development.

Westerners would call the attention to detail "obsessive" and might term a person who focussed on this amount of detail in the process a "perfectionist", often with the connotation of "excessive" perfectionism. Therapists consider such behavior evidence of overconcern with control, and may even relate it to suppressed aggressive tendencies. In fact, our lack of attention to detail, and delaying of the possibility of satisfaction until the completion of a large task,

gives us less ordinary satisfaction, and keeps us in a state of frustration and incompletion, valuing only the final, sometimes unobtainable, product, and not the process by which the product is created.

In Japan, the proper attitude is the first condition for the attainment of various kinds of successes. The motivation provided by the mother, and later, by the teacher, to work hard and commit effort to a task, is one of the major sources of Japanese children's successes school. As discussed above, what is seen as important, in home and school, is the effort generated in a child by a motivating ambience, not gifts or talents endowed by God or nature. Thus, the mother's and teacher's most significant contribution to a child's future success is her ability to communicate the importance of engagement, the same engagement she exhibits in a task, of commitment to a goal, of positive, whole-hearted, energetic responsibility for an outcome.

Beyond Mom: Other Relationships and Influences

What are the other factors in a child's life besides his or her mother, and what are their effects on the school experience? While in the early years of

childhood the mother does indeed dominate the child's life, others, notably the father, grandparents, and peers and siblings do play a role, as does the seken, the watching and exacting normative community, especially as reinforced and evoked by adults in the child's life.

In the literature on Japanese family life, fathers are notable for their absence. As several have observed, the middle class family consists of the core of the mother-child relationship, with the father as little more than a "visitor". The "absent father syndrome" (Yamazaki, 1978) has been cited by psychologists as a factor in severe cases of failure in school or behavioral problems, but as noted above, the mother's role is considered to be far more important. Generally speaking, the father has few regularly assigned tasks in the care of his children in their early years. He may hold the baby occasionally, sometimes bottle feed it, and more often play with it on the floor as it gets older. The father's work requirements usually mean that he is home very little during the child's waking hours, except on Sundays, earning him the title of "Sunday friend" -- the adult who indulges the child on weekends, going on family excursions to the zoo and to parks, or to the big

department stores, a common Sunday diversion for families.

Fathers in Japan may be, as they are elsewhere, the embodiment of external absolute standards and the implementers of just punishments, the "heavies" who may be resorted to by mothers whose patience has run out and who feel they need at least to invoke the father's retributory wrath as a threat. But in fact modern fathers rarely punish and may reward or indulge children even more than do mothers.

Grandparents too indulge the child. While they may not live with their children and grandchildren and thus may not have daily interactions with them, they are a presence.

The father's mother is especially evident through her advice and guidance of her daughter-in-law, explicit and not to be denied in more traditional households and less explicit but still powerful in more modern ones. The mother-in-law (again, a phenomenon not unique in Japan) assumes that her daughter-in-law is an apprentice-mother and that she needs the wisdom of experience or needs to be trained in the "true way". In fact, many mothers do count on their mothers-in-law and if the relationship is an amicable one, the mother may call on her mother-in-law frequently for advice.

Where the mother-in-law is not approached, for reason of emotional or physical distance, the mother calls on her own mother for help. A surprisingly large percentage of women live near their own mothers, and visit them frequently. Most mothers prefer to rely on the advice of others, rather than "experimenting" on their own children. On the other hand, many young mothers, isolated from family or exposed to foreign modes of childrearing, read childrearing manuals written by Japanese and Western specialists and attempt to follow the models presented in such books. "Dr. Spock" was a best-seller in Japan, however far his context and culture were from those of his readers.

Children are of course influenced by their siblings and peers. Birth order, even where the average birth rate is 1.7 children per family, is significant in Japan. One's "rank" in the family has more to do with obligations than with privileges, but being the eldest, particularly the eldest son, has a special cachet. Older sisters are meant to help with younger siblings, while older brothers are meant to "set a good example" for the younger. Young siblings may play together but as they get older, the elder takes on a "teaching" role for the younger and gradually escapes into his or her peer group, television watching, or study.

The peer group outside school is shrinking in its importance for children. Informal observations at playgrounds and parks after school hours indicate that these play spaces are used primarily by pre-school children brought there by mothers, by families on weekends, or by day-care or nursery school groups on expeditions. Older children are scarce. One finds school-age children in groups, going slowly home after school together, stopping to look in shop windows and perhaps buying and eating candy and snacks, prolonging their time together before they go home to get ready for juku, their after school classes, or for study. Rarely do children visit each other at home. Instead, on weekends, older children may arrange to meet at the station for an expedition, or may meet at a playfield for sports. The accidental meetings of children who know they can go outside and find a neighborhood friend to play with have become rare since the development of large apartment blocks and the increase in pressure to study after school. Residential areas are not what they were in the 1950s when Ronald Dore wrote City Life in Japan, when he could describe the spaces and roads between houses as areas of relaxed social intercourse for children and adults.

Finally, children are directly or indirectly influenced by the geken, the "watching" community whose

normative presence is close to what we invoke when we say "What will the neighbors think?" The seken influences mothers who feel judged by others who measure them by their children's behavior and accomplishments. Mothers may not invoke the neighbors as we might, but would themselves feel the need to measure up and thus would try hard to raise children according to the standards of the community. Community pressure is well-known in Japan and has even been consciously manipulated by such bureaucratic institutions as the police. Recently, in Osaka, police mobilized the mothers of a neighborhood to "cut" socially another mother whose husband, a known gangster, had moved his family into the area. The ostracized mother persuaded her husband to move back into the gangster's neighborhood where the police had hoped to contain the "bad elements". Less dramatic evidence of the power of the seken can be seen when a mother sends her children to a locally-preferred juku or when she quits her part time job to be more appropriately at home, even when her children are in school during her work hours.

Changes: Recognizing Diversity

As stated earlier, the Japanese middle-class family of the 1960s and early 1970s, which forms the basis for much of the literature on family in Japan has experienced some change in the post-boom years. And yet the literature indicates that rather than change, the revelation of existing diversity has had the greatest impact on our picture of the Japanese family. There has been an increase in literature, for example, on family, schooling and other influences on children's achievement as they are affected by socioeconomic class differences. (DeVos, 1979; Rohlen, 1977; Cummings, 1981 ). It is clear that class differences are not a new phenomenon in Japan, but are only recently observed, due to an earlier emphasis on the uniform and "middle class" nature of the images projected by the Japanese themselves and by the readiness of Western observers to overcharacterize conformity in Japan. These arenas of difference have not been well documented or analyzed by Japanese or Western social scientists, and remain an area needing further study.

I would like to suggest that it is the recognition of diversity which will produce new views of

childrearing practises and expectations in Japan, rather than an elucidation of the changes in the middle class family. It is especially in the middle years of childhood, during the later years of elementary school, that distinctions can be made -- that family orientation towards school achievement, the family's ability to support private tuition, and mother's availability to children at home begin to be variables of concern in children's school success. In families not oriented toward academic achievement, and toward the occupational opportunities afforded by academic achievement, children are less apt to be encouraged to succeed in school. And yet, even these families are often mobilized to support their children in school by the pressure of the community, for to be a good parent in Japan is to be a parent of children successful in school. Thus families of relatively low income spend a disproportionate amount on children's tutoring or juku, in hopes that they can do well, or in a latter day Horatio Alger mode, in hopes that they can rise in a society still based on meritocratic principles.

It is, however, evident that children of lower income homes are more often to be found in the ranks of the "drop-outs" or in less prestigious high schools and colleges. (Rohlen, 1982) An individual's chances are of course hard to gauge, but it is less likely that

a child of such a family will be found at Tokyo University or other prestigious national universities (Cummings). Unlike the situation in the United States, where the highest prestige schools are private, and charge the highest tuition, in Japan it is the public, low fee charging schools which are at the top of everyone's list, and theoretically, available to all. What creates the gap for the poorer children is the cost of years of private tutoring and classes, which is simply out of reach for many families. Thus, with the increase in competition for the scarce places at such schools, "diversity" becomes a new factor in the sorting of a child's life chances. The entering classes at Tokyo University are becoming increasingly homogeneous, representing not elite or "privileged" classes per se, but the brightest of the rich. The economic diversity of the population is revealed, and becomes a significant aspect of the selection system as the competition becomes fiercer.

Pressures and Problems in School

The fierce competition has produced other effects and other problems for Japanese children. Among these are certain pathologies which have received much attention in the media and which represent foci for

change for many reformers. Ijime, the phenomenon of bullying in the schools, particularly in the third year of middle school, has reached headline attention in the media and the nightly television news regularly reports the number and type of incidents, rather like the charting of the weather report.

Japanese commentators attribute ijime first to personality problems among the victimized, then to pressures in school affecting the bullies, and finally to children's lack of support from teachers and other adults when they are bullied. Japanese psychologists have said that the victims are hounded because they are "different", or have "dark personalities", and are not good members of the group.

Recent examples noted in the press include that of a 13-year-old middle school girl who hung herself from a cord attached to a utility pole. Her classmates had ostracised her, and taunted her by writing epithets in her textbooks. They threw stones at her house. The tormentors were said to be her friends, girls in her class. Another, a 16-year-old high school boy in Osaka, was found beaten and drowned in a river. He had been killed with a hammer by two classmates whom he had teased and tormented by painting their faces and whipping them with a belt. These cases of ijime are extreme, and make good press, but milder cases are

apparently an everyday matter in schools, though the reported numbers are slight: out of 15,000 middle and high schools, only 531 incidents were reported in 1984 -- hardly the stuff of our "blackboard jungles".

Critics of the educational system say that ijime is the result of the failure of the system to stream ambitions and energies appropriately. An editorial in the Asahi Newspaper suggests that the children who bully are taking out on other children, weaker and in some way "different", what is perpetrated on them by the system. They are being taught that uniformity is necessary, that deviance is to be eradicated, and under pressure to homogenize themselves, they may try to homogenize others. Because of the intense interest and concern created in the media over this issue, the Ministry of Education created a committee on ijime on April 15, 1985, and will conduct extensive research on this problem.

The focus for all the competition and pressure is of course, the examinations. These are the tests by which a child passes from junior high to high school and from secondary school to college. Since high school is not a part of compulsory schooling, children take exams even to enter public high schools. Thus the pressure to acquire exam-appropriate knowledge and

skills can begin as early as middle school, and although approximately 95% of children attend some kind of high school, the question of one's future is broached as early as the second year of junior high, if not earlier. For twelve-year-olds, it is a rather abrupt shift from the nurturant, accepting, non-differentiating style of their early education to the more effort-oriented struggle of secondary schools. This shift may account for the relatively high rate of deliquency and other school-related syndromes in the third year of middle school.

Not everyone is so deeply invested in the exams. It is estimated that about ten percent of the age group is engaged in the heat of the struggle to get into the top universities. But to some degree, everyone is invested in school performance. It is, however, the ten per cent on the top track who manage to catch the imagination of the press and public, and who look to the outside world like obsessive, future workaholics who have fired Japanese economic successes, and who, by their energy and do-or-die drive seem inhuman to Western observers. It is this group to whom the dictum "Pass with four; fail with five" has meaning -- if you get as much as five hours sleep at night, you aren't studying hard enough.

The examinations are given in March, and each year at this time there is a spate of information, folk lore and gossipy data in the press focussed on students, their lives and chances. There are photographs in the newspapers of mothers waiting outside examination sites, stories of crisis and tragedy. In 1984, a sixth grader taking an entrance exam into one of the country's most prestigious secondary schools, experienced a "nervous breakdown" during the exam, and had to be taken out by ambulance -- a failure at the age of 12. It turned out that he had been very well prepared indeed, but his state of anxiety was such that seeing the actual exam triggered a total loss of control. There are other such stories, some of children soiling their pants in the exams, some of parents themselves breaking down outside the exam building, or attacking the examiners and proctors. One famous story of the past decade was that of a father who took the entranc exams to a university for his daughter, in disguise. He wore a wig and dressed in woman's clothing, and a lot of makeup. He was confronted after the exam, by a suspicious examiner who noticed stubble on his chin showing through the pancake makeup.

In fairness to parents, it should be said that nearly all deplore the system and its pressures, but they understand that they have little choice but to

comply with it, and they do not want to risk their child's chances. They often decide to work with the exam-taker, not against the system.

It is the mother who must somehow encourage her child to study very hard. The mother is careful to engage with the child, "on the same side" with him against the exam, for she does not want to represent the problem herself. The teacher and mother work together to decide the best methods for helping the child and the child sees them as allies. Ideally, the child internalizes the goal of doing well on the exam, and to work not only to please his mother and teachers, but also for the pleasure of his own performance. Also ideally, if he fails, he is spared the feeling that the failure is his fault, or that he is somehow inferior to those who were accepted. The support and active assistance of the mother also deflect some of the responsibility from the child, since he can feel that others worked with him to prepare. A failure is, however, keenly felt by the mother, who takes the blame on herself and will often sequester herself at home for weeks afterwards, ashamed to meet other mothers.

Work at school is supplemented by work at home, and while the child works, his mother sits by him, very much as she did when he was a sleeping infant, to keep him company as he works. A best-selling home study

desk for children symbolizes her intense care and the generally nurturant and protective atmosphere of study in Japan. The desk's workspace is surrounded on three sides by shelves and wooden walls, shielding the child from distraction. All the necessities are contained within: lights, electric pencil sharpener, built-in calculator, drawers for equipment. In the deluxe model there is a button connected to a bell to be mounted in the kitchen, for the child to summon his mother for help or for a snack.

In contrast to the demanding emphasis on the development of academic abilities in individuals, the criteria for membership in the classroom group are explicitly not linked to abilities. The child is accepted for the person that he is, irrespective of the level of his academic abilities. Children are neither failed nor skipped ahead, and a child can be sure of an unquestioned place in the cohort of classmates who stay together, usually through middle school, despite differences in academic abilities. These contrasting characteristics have been termed a hard/soft bifurcation, with the public school classroom seen as a "soft" environment, characterized by non-critical support and harmony and the after-school cram classes as a "hard" element, where the children are drilled intensively to prepare them for the examinations.

Even the juku and yobiko, the afterschool classes and cram schools, however, emphasize the importance of engagement and see emotional factors as key to a child's learning. As one researcher in Tokyo put it, the juku is good one if it "captures the child's imagination through exhortatory language, a "campaign atmosphere", and an energetic pace. In contrast, he said, the bright student is bored in an ordinary school. Good juku exude feelings of cheer and eagerness, and even the top-track yobiko, aimed at the most prestigious universities, is upbeat -- cheery music fills the halls and the director encourages a "we-feeling" in the school. Pressure and the intensity of competitive measurement do not always produce a negative mood.

The following description of a small juku of a different sort provides a context for considering some of the psychocultural factors, maternal and external, which inform the best of Japanese learning environments.

A juku teacher

Tadano Sagara has been a juku teacher for seventeen years. He has a small juku -- a second-floor classroom, seating eight to ten children, in Toshima-ku, Tokyo. Sagara, age 41, is a graduate of Tokyo University's

philosophy department. He has been a juku teacher ever since he graduated.

Sagara's juku is rather unprepossessing. It is a tidy but shabby room, crowded with books and equipment, with small desks and chairs arranged in an L-shaped pattern in the center of the room. A blackboard is on one wall, and a shelf over a sink holds teacups and glasses.

Sagara's charges come to see him after school, and on the weekend, usually twice a week. These are junior and senior high school children, mostly from the local area, whose parents have heard of Sagara through word of mouth. Unlike other juku (which may have much larger classes) Sagara does not advertise. Sagara's fees are standard. His classes cost parents about Y18,000 per month, or about $US 84.

Sagara's pupils are heading to the exams for high school and university, and they are here because their teachers, or their parents, are hoping that Sagara's special attentions will help put a child into the running for a slot in a good school. Some children are here because they've tried other juku, or other tutors, and they haven't caught fire. This is not a remedial juku: the children are all bright, he says, but some have "attitude problems" or need better study habits.

Toru Shigematsu is fifteen and has been a student of Sagara's for three years. Toru is shy but stubborn: he is very intelligent, but his standards for himself are high and he is uncompromising, and thus he is often frustrated and unhappy. His perfectionism is a problem for him, but so is his independence: he insists on working in his own way, at hours which worry his mother (usually 1 a.m. to 6 a.m.) and only on the subjects which interest him. Sagara's job is to find a middle ground for him, a realistic goal and a less idiosyncratic means towards that goal which will allow Toru to have more suitable schedules and habits, while working to the best of his ability. While increasing Toru's confidence, Sagara also must lessen his parents' anxieties.

Sagara's approach is first to understand the child. He can quickly see the child's ability level in various subjects, at least as ordinarily tested, but motivation is harder to grasp. He says it takes six to eight months of observation to get to know the child. He commented that in his juku, as in the ordinary classroom, the overt assumption is that "all have equal ability", but he, and all teachers, know that "ten children have ten different ability levels", and his operating premise thus diverges from the idea of egalitarian homogeneity said to underlie Japanese

education. Sagara says he knows his charges better than the classroom teacher, who, after all, has over 40 pupils to observe. He says his juku resembles the very personal environment of the traditional terakoya or temple school, where the relationship between pupil and teacher was close and personal. Most juku, however, are much larger and this kind of relationship is impossible. Twice a year Sagara has long interviews with his students' parents, to evaluate their children's progress and to allow him to judge their involvement.

Sagara says that the most important qualities for a Japanese child today, "in these hard times", are a "strong and energetic spirit" and a "wide intellectual grasp". Juku like his can help a child develop confidence, and focus on specific weak areas at the same time. He says that all the children he teaches want to be there, at least after a while, and really understand that he cares about them.

In talking with students and former students of Sagara's juku, I found unanimous praise and warmth for him. The students see him on their side, as uncompromisingly working with them, and sometimes even as an ally against their parents. He constantly rewards them, and often provides nurturance in the form of treats and surprises, such as running out for ice cream on a hot day, or buying them books as special

gifts. Sagara gave Toru some comic books when he was sick, and promised him a whole set if his exams came out well. The relationship is often a teasing, big-brother sort: Sagara once had a bet with his students about the answer to a very hard problem, and said that if he were proven wrong, he'd cut his hair very short. He was and he did. He is boyish and dresses casually, and the intensity of study is mitigated by his cheerful liveliness. His former students show their fondness for him by returning often, and some come back to help tutor students themselves. They all cite Sagara as one of the most important people in their lives.

## Conclusion: A Confusion of Goals

While many observers have noted an increase in pressure on children in recent years, to work hard to succeed in school, they do not agree on the source of the pressure. Some say it is from parents, some from the existence of the juku system, some say it is the school system itself, both in the structure which requires testing at junior high and high school levels and in the central authorities' refusal to develop mitigating programs and policies.

It is not clear that parental attitudes have greatly changed. Mothers continue to support and encourage children and parents continue to seek the best options for their child's academic success, giving highest priority to improving their children's school achievement. For the most part, children are engaged in the same goals. However, as noted earlier, there is an apparently increasing gap between adult expectations for children and culturally approved behavior modes and personality traits on the one hand, and on the other those of children, particularly as they approach high school and college.

Children's values have perhaps always diverged from those of adults, but this discrepancy is now more overt, as illustrated in the discussions of ijime. Through the stories and analyses of incidents of bullying, we can see that children's peer relationships are based in values different from those of adults. One of the frequently cited forms of "differentness which is punished by peers is "seriousness": a child who studies too much may be punished.

The quiet child was valued in the past, but now he is described as ne__ga__kurai (shortened to nekura) or "dark-spirited" as opposed to the sociable, lively "bright-spirited"child (ne___ga___akarui or neaka). Contemplation and quiet in children now makes them

suspect to their peers, indicating sneakiness, or associated with competitive study and cramming. A "cool" child is one who is engaged in the peer group, not in study, and thus not in adult goals. There is now a new distinction in Japan between a child who does well and a child who is popular with his friends. The distinction is more critical to the child at middle school level, where streaming has not yet begun, and where there is more diversity in the class.

The confusion of goals for children might be attributed in part to the increase of ambiguity in the public treatment of education. The social consensus which produced the phenomenal successes of the 1960s and 1970s persists, supporting education as a national priority, enforced in school, home and public discussion. But the active debate on an appropriate education for Japan's post-industrial society and the observations by some parents and educators of children's negative reactions to pressure, have produced a reconsideration of the cultural goals for childhood. At present, this reconsideration is being formalized by various official committees and private study groups but exists on the whole in rhetoric rather than in action.

The psychocultural bases of Japanese children's acknowledged successes in school have not eroded significantly. Mothers provide the care and nurturance,

schools have high standards and excellent teachers, and Japanese policymakers still focus on children as the nation's most important resource. The structure of schooling, driven by the "dark engine of the exams" (Rohlen, 1982) has led, however, to some destructive forces which have set children against each other and which threaten to demoralize teachers and parents as well. But the existence of Sagara's juku, ironically established within the category of an institution frequently blamed for the stresses experienced by Japanese children, is an indicator that the priorities given to children and to engaged learning still survive.

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